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ABSTRACT

Effective accountability always involves four essential elements: Knowledge of what is required, knowledge of who is responsible to whom, knowledge of how to be successful, and knowledge of the consequences of not being successful. The movement in education now called accountability has added the additional requirement that educators stipulate the objectives to be achieved by students, the actual success in achieving them, and the costs incurred in the process. This is probably best called performance accountability; its underlying theme is that the objective of education is learning, not teaching. The appropriate unit of accountability for results is the school and the school district. If the school as a system does not attain its objectives--if students do not learn--the system is redesigned until they do. Regardless of the results, the students or parents or teacher are not blamed for failure to learn. (Author/JG)

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Accountability: Brand L.

By Leon M. Lessinger

It is sometimes alleged that I am the "father" of educational accountability. The allegation is untrue. I have been an early exponent of "project" accountability (particularly those projects involving federal funds), and a proponent of accountability for results for the outcomes of training. The accountability concept has long outrun the narrow confines I chose to propose and implement and I feel an obligation, therefore, to publish "my brand." Thus, the title "Accountability: Brand L."

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(Presentation at the National Forum on Educational Accountability,
Denver, Colorado, May 1975)

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As a word, accountability is a new term in education; as a concept, it is very old.

Accountability is a particular kind of responsibility: one that has assured consequences. It is the assurance of a consequence that changes a responsibility into an accountability. Some examples outside of education may be useful in grasping the notion of accountability in education.

From the standpoint of an individual:

A politician is accountable to his constituents for his record. If they approve, he may be reelected; if they disapprove, he may be removed. A physician is accountable to his patients for knowing and using "good practice" in the diagnosis and treatment of a particular condition. If he does not use "good practice" he may be legally sued for malpractice.

From the standpoint of an organization:

A supermarket is accountable for its products. If a product is spoiled, the customer may get a refund or a new product. An airline is accountable for its schedule. If a connection is missed, the airline must make appropriate arrangements.

When it is effective, accountability always involves four essential elements: knowledge of what is required, knowledge of who is responsible to whom, knowledge of how to be successful and knowledge of the consequences of not being successful.

To be accountable, an individual must know what he or she is responsible for, to whom, how to carry out the responsibility correctly, and the nature of the consequences.

To be accountable, an organization must have clearly defined purposes, goals and objectives, statements of responsibility, a facilitative organization, two-way

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communication, supportive programs of logistics and training, adequate resources, quality control, and other aspects of good management. A well managed organization pursuing accountability is success-oriented and therefore seeks to make work productive and all its personnel achieving. To this end it employs a humanistic brand of Management by Objectives, what I have termed Management by Reflection. The heart of Management by Reflection is feedback and redesign for success. The intent is always to make "everyone a winner."

It is important to explain what accountability is not.

It is not a method--any method. Thus, it is not PPBES, system design, performance contracting or vouchers, though each of these methods thought to be useful in achieving organizational accountability has its supporters and detractors.

It is not an attack on a group--any group. Thus it is not a scheme to embarrass or blame teachers, students, board members, parents, legislators or administrators.

It is not an attempt to trivialize the curriculum or to mandate a curriculum--any curriculum. It focuses on ends and fosters the greatest freedom for means.

It is not limited to a school or college--any educational organization. Similar logic is being applied to the fields of health, welfare, justice, government and it is well known in business and religion.

How Does It Apply to Schools?

Schools have had and do have many responsibilities for which there are assured consequences. In every case these particular responsibilities are carried out well. This is so because in every case both individuals and organizations are clear about what is required, know who is responsible to whom, know how to be successful and know what the consequences will be. The following chart of Successful Educational Accountability in Schools illustrates these points.

Name of Accountability	What is Required?	Who is Responsible? ... to whom?	How can the Requirement be Successfully Discharged?	What are the Consequences?
Custodial Accountability	Safety and location of students	Educators to parents	Roll keeping Hall passes Reports to Administration	Reprimands to Administrators and teachers
Fiscal Accountability	Public budget Accurate accounting and bookkeeping Independent audit	District officials to local, state and federal authorities	Elaborate technology from business sector	Objective feed- back from audit and redesign; Criminal penalties
Outside Organization Accountability	Selected input standards, e.g., degrees, space, salaries	Public to Education profession	Standards published by professional accrediting operations	Loss of accreditation sanctions
College Preparatory Accountability	Standard college preparatory program	Schools to colleges	College catalogs, books, visits from professors, courses	Graduates not admitted to college or required to take special tests

The movement in education now called accountability has added an additional requirement to this chart. It is a requirement that educators and schools stipulate the objectives to be achieved by students, the actual success in achieving them, and the costs incurred in the achievement of that success.

I want now to indicate what I believe is required for this accountability--who is responsible to whom, how the requirement can be successfully achieved and what the consequences ought to be.

This particular responsibility is probably best called performance accountability or accountability for results. A brief account of the reasons and need for this accountability now and in the future may be helpful.

The underlying theme of this accountability is that the objective of education is learning, not teaching.

Herman Bevis predicted an accountability movement of this type in 1959:

Observers of the Washington scene are usually amazed at how little time is devoted to finding out the actual results of what happened under the budgets and appropriations on which so much time was spent. . .

It seems inevitable that there will ultimately be greater emphasis on accountability in the supervision and management of the federal government's operations.¹

A good example of this prediction come true can be seen in the largest segment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Local education agency recipients of ESEA Title I grant-in-aids for educationally deprived children are specifically directed in the enabling legislation to adopt ". . . effective procedures, including . . . appropriate objective measuring of educational achievement, . . . for evaluating at least annually the effectiveness of the program in meeting the special educational needs of educationally deprived children."²

Tyler sums up the basic reasons for the rather sudden emergence of the term "accountability" as applied to the process and outcomes rather than solely on the inputs of the process.

Three recent developments appear to have influenced the current emphasis and concern with accountability: namely, the increasing proportion of the average family's income that is spent on taxes, the recognition that a considerable fraction of youth are failing to meet the standards of literacy now demanded for employment in civilian or military jobs, and the development of management procedures by industry and defense that have increased the effectiveness and efficiency of certain production organizations. These developments have occurred almost simultaneously, and each has focused public attention on the schools.³

What is Required in Performance Accountability?

Since performance accountability focuses on results--student learning--it is necessary to specify as completely as possible what the outcomes of instruction shall be in terms of the behaviors or achievements of the students.

This can be satisfactorily done for the training experiences provided. It cannot be done for the educative and celebrative experiences which are equally desirable. In the former case, the behaviors are directly measurable, while in the latter case, only the processes or situations can adequately be described and the appropriate measurement is a check-list of occurrence and participation.

Since effectiveness is required to be reported, a management information system must be installed and be functioning well.

Who is Responsible to Whom?

The appropriate unit of accountability for results is the school and the school district. Accountability is a system concept--a set of mutual and interdependent relationships and functions to achieve a defined purpose. A teacher cannot be held solely responsible for results. He or she can be held responsible only for knowing and using "good practice." By definition, good practice should yield positive results. Over time,--at least three to five years,--differentials in success by teachers of comparable clientele can be studied and system changes (e.g., changes in resource allocation, training, methodology, etc.) can be made to improve the effectiveness of those not functioning at optimal levels.

A further word about accountability as a system concept is necessary here. The system nature of accountability implies a remarkable change in attitude toward the process of instruction. This is an attitude of system responsibility for results. If the school as a system does not attain the objectives it sets or that are set for it*--if the students do not learn--the system is redesigned until they do. This redesign may involve upgrading of training; new resources; improved methods; improved materials. Regardless of the results, the students or parents or teachers are not blamed for failure to learn. It is the system's job to get the required or desired results. If it does not, it is worked on--using the best of management techniques and strategy--until it does.

The system's responsibility for results is to its clients, the students and their parents, and to its patrons, the taxpayers and citizenry. It bears a particular responsibility to its employees also. As a well managed organization, it must employ the best leadership practices known. Fortunately, these include an emphasis on concern for human growth and fulfillment as well as on getting optimal results.

Can the Requirement for Achieving Stipulated Results Be Successfully Discharged?

The question boils down to this: do we have a technology of instruction--do we know things that work? In certain vital areas of instruction, such as training, I think the answer is yes; in other areas, probably no.

We have a technology of instruction for training, i.e., for instruction designed to enable students to perform in a specific situation. Furthermore, we have solid clues to an emerging technology for important aspects of education.

It is vital that we be clear about what is meant by technology (I prefer to call it "good practice"). Technology is a technique or set of techniques known to

*My own feeling is that objectives should be derived from needs assessments with broad participation of teachers, administrators, parents, students and significant others.

change or improve conditions or clients in anticipated ways. Technology is knowledge of "what works" in a fairly reliable way. The knowledge does not have to be perfect--the proportion of successes can even be relatively small; however, the successes must be better than chance, be secured repeatedly and be judged valuable enough to be continued. Equipment is not synonymous with technology--it is a tool of technology. Technology--good practice--rests upon sound knowledge of the materials or the people being "helped."⁴

We know some of the important dimensions of this technology.

First, through empirical studies and logical reasoning carried on over the last 25 years, we have learned both how to derive needed objectives and how to communicate them in verifiable form. Bloom et. al., 1956⁵ and Krathwohl et. al., 1964⁶ were early leaders in this area.

Objectives suitable for classroom use have been prepared and are being successfully utilized to get student achievement. The work of Mager, 1962⁷ and Stones, 1972⁸ has been especially helpful.

Second, careful analysis and observation of teacher and student verbal behavior and the impact of such behavior on student achievement has been made available and is being used successfully. Medley and Mitzel, 1963^{9a + b}, Bellack et. al., 1966¹⁰, and Flanders, 1961¹¹ are particularly instructive.

Third, there is a wealth of knowledge available for inducing and educating the cognitive development of students. Taba, 1965¹² is representative.

Fourth, a great deal is known about how to manage the classroom adequately and how to promote good behavior and diminish problems of poor discipline. Kounin, 1970¹³ is particularly valuable both for the theory and practice of this important aspect of teaching.

Fifth, considerable research has been conducted on the relationship of personality

variables and role behaviors of teachers and students. This research has provided sound insights and practices for teachers to use in developing optimal classroom "climates" that have high probability of improving student achievement and self development. The works of Getzels and Jackson, 1963¹⁴, Ryans, 1960¹⁵, Biddle and Thomas, 1966¹⁶, Walberg, 1968¹⁷, Amidon and Flanders, 1967¹⁸ are especially valuable.

Finally, we have field tested knowledge about how to successfully train virtually the whole range of students present in our schools. Smith, 1971¹⁹, and Tracey, 1971²⁰, have compiled these techniques and suggested their underlying principles.

There is a growing volume of material available on which to base a truly scientific approach to teaching with the object of securing pre-specified results. Stones and Morris, 1972²¹ have brought much of this material together to help in the area of teacher training.

What are the Consequences?

This is perhaps the most controversial aspect of accountability for results. Teachers understandably fear and oppose an unfair and unsound reaction in the form of threats to fire them, blaming or even placing the full burden of shortcomings on them.

One reads that the consequences of a lack of accountability for results are already being seen in the failures of school levies and a supposed loss of credibility by the schools. This is virtually impossible to verify and is, in any case, a counterproductive way to achieve such accountability.

I reject any approach to accountability which is negative or punishing or seeks to lay blame. Even if such approaches were effective, they would be inimical to good management and would run counter to the wholesome zeitgeist of an educational system.

There is only productive approach to the issue of consequences. It is the approach proven successful in all of the other accountabilities in education. I refer to accurate feedback on any gaps between what was intended and what was achieved, technical assistance to help the organization be successful, and appropriate time and rewards to get where we can all agree we must arrive.

Summary

Accountability can be the philosophical spur through which we may achieve new heights in public education. In an era of cynicism and loss of confidence in public institutions, it can help to restore confidence and strengthen competence. I make no claims for the originality of Brand L. It is the form of accountability I hold and which I deeply believe can help public education further realize its magnificent potential.

Notes

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